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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 002694

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AF FOR AF/E AND A/S JENDAYI FRAZER  
NSC FOR SENIOR DIRECTOR FOR AFRICA BOBBY PITTMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/27/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [ET](#) [ER](#)

SUBJECT: MELES ON ERITREA, THE ONLF, AND THE OGADEN

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DONALD YAMAMOTO FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) & (D)

**¶11. (C) Summary:** In an August 27 meeting with the Ambassador, Prime Minister Meles said that the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC) has no legal basis to demarcate the Ethio-Eritrean border by geographic coordinates. He argued that while Eritrean President Isaias may remove the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) from Eritrea, Meles does not expect either war or an improvement in the situation. Meles cautioned the U.S. on the August 17 press statement by Assistant Secretary Frazer in which she noted that the USG is exploring designating Eritrea as a state sponsor of terrorism. Meles remarked that if you press Isaias, be prepared to follow through. Meles also expressed concern on reports that the Chairman and Foreign Affairs head of the Ogadeni National Liberation Front (ONLF) had recently traveled throughout the U.S. While Amb. Yamamoto stressed that the Administration had not met, and has no plans to meet, with ONLF officials, Meles was concerned of the public message sent by the act of granting ONLF leaders visas to the U.S. to fund raise and meet with members of Congress. On the Ogaden, Meles "welcomed" UN, World Food Program, and others to provide humanitarian assistance in the region, but was emphatic that all must abide by Ethiopian Government (GoE) guidelines, or "they can leave the country." End Summary.

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VISAS TO THE ONLF  
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**¶12. (C)** Meles expressed concern that the ONLF Chairman and Foreign Policy director had, in fact, been in Washington, DC for meetings with the diaspora as well as with Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and opposition diaspora leaders. Ambassador Yamamoto gave Meles a personal letter confirming that the Administration has not, and has no plans to, meet with ONLF officials. While Meles was satisfied that the Administration did not meet with ONLF officials, his concern was the optic generated by the United States' issuance of visas to officials of what Ethiopia considers a terrorist group. The ONLF went to the U.S. to fund raise and meet with members of Congress. Meles repeated that the GoE "wants to quarantine the rest of the US-Ethiopia relationship from the contamination of the ONLF issue." (Note: While the GoE considers the ONLF a terrorist group, the USG views them as a nationalist movement that has predominantly targeted GoE and Ethiopian military entities in response to the marginalization of the Ogadeni people.)

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO THE OGADEN

¶13. (SBU) Ambassador Yamamoto thanked Prime Minister Meles for the GoE's authorization for a UN humanitarian monitoring team to travel to the Ogaden region to assess conditions. (Note: Ambassador and Post worked persistently behind the scenes to secure the UN team's entry in the Ogaden.) Meles stated that humanitarian assistance is now flowing into the Ogaden and said that humanitarian organizations will be free to go into the Ogaden and assign distributors of assistance freely, and that the GoE can provide security for humanitarian deliveries. Still, he advised that such organizations must strictly abide by the GoE's guidelines. While Meles did not clarify what the guidelines included, he argued that the GoE has reason to believe that NGOs have met with, and some are aiding, the ONLF with money raised abroad. Meles advised that the GoE will arrest and prosecute anyone meeting with or assisting the ONLF.

ERITREA AS A STATE SPONSOR OF TERRORISM

¶14. (C) Meles cautioned the U.S. over A/S Frazer's August 17 press statements that the USG is considering designating Eritrea as a state sponsor of terrorism. Meles advised that it is critical to understand Isaias' psyche, and that one must be prepared to follow-through on any effort to press Isaias. &If you use a gun, make sure there is a bullet in it,<sup>8</sup> Meles added. Meles said that the statement was counterproductive because it could be construed by those

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against the Eritrean Government (GSE) as a victory though nothing has happened, while those who support the GSE will use the lack of action as a victory.

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COMMENT  
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¶15. (C) USG comments on Eritrea and U.S. attitudes toward the ONLF will be key topics for the September 8 bilateral meetings with A/S Frazer and NSC Senior Director Pittman. In light of his long personal relationship with Isaias, seeking Meles' insights on tactics to use in pressuring Isaias and the GSE could be fruitful. The GoE has an agenda in casting the ONLF as a terrorist group, and will press the USG's position that the ONLF is an ethnic nationalist movement with some legitimate concerns and not as a threat to Americans or U.S. interests at this point. The GoE's approval for the UN monitoring mission to the Ogaden is a welcome step in the right direction -- after heavy U.S. and international pressure -- and Post will continue to press the GoE to take further steps to avoid worsening humanitarian conditions in the Ogaden while pursuing its legitimate national security concerns.

YAMAMOTO